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SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

DELIVERED AT THE OPENING OF THE FIRST
SESSION OF THE 22ND LEGISLATURE OF
THE PROVINCE OF ALBERTA ON
THURSDAY, JUNE 1, 1989

THE HONOURABLE W. HELEN HUNLEY
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR, PROVINCE OF ALBERTA

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly.

I have the honour to welcome you to the First Session of the Twenty-second Legislature of the Province of Alberta.

During this important Session my government will re-affirm the legislative and budgetary policies for the priorities and programs outlined at the opening of the Fourth Session of the Twenty-first Legislature on February 17, 1989 and so strongly endorsed by Albertans. My government has been entrusted with a leadership role for all Albertans, and the effective management of our Province is a challenge that is accepted with enthusiasm and pride.

Alberta's economy recovered strongly in 1988, with over 40,000 new jobs created to mark the highest employment level in our Province's history. In addition, 12,000 more jobs have been created in the first three months of 1989. While wages and salaries rose, Albertans enjoyed the second lowest consumer price increases in Canada in 1988; and increases have been moderate in 1989. However, the high interest rate policy emanating from Ottawa has caused concerns for the prospect of Alberta's continued recovery in 1989.

Recognizing the adverse consequences such a policy has on Albertans, my government moved quickly to introduce a major Interest-Shielding Program to help Albertans with their home mortgages; to assist renters and families to purchase their dreamed-of first home; to ensure the continued growth of our small businesses and to strengthen the viability of Alberta's family farms and ranches.

The remaining months of the fiscal year 1989-90 will be more difficult than first anticipated, but with my government's continued priority of fiscal responsibility and prudent management of our renewable and non-renewable resources, Alberta's economy will continue to grow in full partnership with Albertans from every walk of life.

Agriculture strengthened through 1988, and new expansion and record growth in our important tourism and advanced technology sectors have been exciting factors in the diversification plans of my government.

The most remarkable growth, however, occurred in the forestry industry, with 11 major developments, totaling more than $3.5 billion, committed to Alberta.

While economic development within our province is essential to create and sustain employment, it is vital that our clean environment be protected. Our ability to discuss and consolidate the views of all sectors will be strengthened by my government's establishment of a multi-sectoral Environment Round Table.

Those involved will work to meet the challenge of building consensus and developing proposals to coordinate and integrate environmental and economic decisions.

My government is firmly convinced that social and economic development are inseparable. Since this beautiful province was formed in 1905, Albertans have shared with those in need of special care or other forms of assistance — a trust that will continue.

The values that were inherent in the building of our province by our forefathers: love of family, home, community and province, have, as was so aptly put by a former member of this Legislature, made Alberta the sparkling jewel in the necklace of Confederation. These values will be strengthened by new measures stressing the importance of Alberta families.

Diversification – A Blueprint for Success

Through the concerted efforts of my government during the last few years, the pulse of Alberta's economy has moved from irregular to strong. New industries have become solidly entrenched in our everyday business life, creating new jobs and security for Albertans all across our province.

A dramatic and historic breakthrough has been made in the promotion of a more diverse economy. New confidence and investments flow across Alberta. Our economy now grows from a stronger healthier base because of my government's leadership. Economic growth builds from new agriculture, food processing, conventional energy, oil sands and heavy oil production and upgrading, oil and natural gas pipeline expansion, petrochemicals, magnesium production, forestry, tourism, advanced technology and research and manufacturing activities.

The government of Canada has committed $1.8 billion for western regional development over the next five years. The Canada/Alberta Economic and Regional Development Agreement provides for joint planning and programming. My Ministers will work with the Government of Canada to ensure initiatives are targeted to Alberta's needs.

Forestry

An important renewable resource, Alberta's forests provide a tremendous potential for diversification, and in just three short years investments totalling $3.5 billion have been realized, which will generate over 12,000 jobs.

Many of our smaller centres in Alberta will receive the benefits of this investment in timber harvesting and lumber processing, but beyond that, suppliers of office goods, truckers, engineers, welders, equipment, catering and manufacturing supplies will also benefit. In addition, the construction industry will be required for the new buildings, roads, railways and utilities necessary for forestry development.

Research to develop new products and processes, and faster growing and healthier trees will continue. Prompt reforestation of harvested areas is mandatory, and my government is seeking out the most effective way to increase our tree nursery capacity, which produced enough seedlings last year to replant 30,000 acres.

A new Wildlife Conservation Strategy for Alberta, includes a comprehensive antipoaching campaign, a significant increase in the number of Fish and Wildlife officers, various habitat related programs, and the development of a provincial fisheries management program.

Tourism – The Goal is World Wide Recognition

Tourism is Alberta's third largest and most rapidly growing industry. Valued at $2.5 billion annually at the present time, my government has set a goal of building a $10 billion tourist industry, recognized for its excellence around the world, by the year 2000. My government will seek this growth in partnership with communities, the private sector and tourism zones throughout the province.

Significant support will be provided for tourism foundations at the community level; regional and provincial tourism generators; infrastructure and transportation access; quality tourism and hospitality services; and agressive marketing.

Regional tourism attractions attract hundreds of thousands of tourists annually. My government plans to develop more of these high calibre projects and is currently investigating the potential of new projects in our magnificent north.

Family Vacation Destination Resorts are among the most promising projects being considered, and my government will be working with the private sector to build them near major attractions thus encouraging visitors to stay longer in our province.

Alberta's vibrant arts community is important to Albertans and visitors. Our artists, and the organizations and volunteers that sustain them, whether in the visual arts, performing arts, film or literary arts, are a vital asset to our province.

In recognition of the value of the arts and culture to all Albertans, from pre-schoolers to family groups to seniors, my government will continue to meet its long-standing commitment to support the arts in Alberta.

A recently announced program for a lottery-based initiative will protect and support the professional performing arts organizations in the province.

A recent cooperative research program, "The Dinosaur Project: China-Canada-Alberta-Ex Terra", has begun to develop the world's largest travelling exhibition of dinosaurs. This exhibition will start in 1991 and be seen in 14 cities around the world by over 12 million people. Alberta is a major partner in this project, and will receive unprecedented international attention for our dinosaur attractions for tourism, as well as build our scientific liaison internationally.

Advanced Technologies – A Key to Our Future

The 21st Century is little more than a decade away. As we approach this landmark in human development, many challenges must be met and opportunities must be seized.

My Government believes that the development and application of advanced technologies will provide an important key to Alberta's future prosperity. Advanced technologies have the potential to keep our traditional resource-based industries competitive and strong; to create new industries and jobs; to provide new career opportunities for our youth; to solve many of the environmental, health and safety problems facing the world; and to improve our quality of life through modern conveniences.

Last year, my Government's support for research and development activities in Alberta exceeded $240 million — an amount greater than that provided by any other province. These funds contributed to valuable research in many fields: from the petroleum industry to agriculture; computers and microelectronics to lasers; medical and pharmaceutical products to agriculture biotechnologies, to name only a few.

My government will continue to support and encourage the growth of this important sector, not only through research and development, but by stimulating the commercialization of new technologies developed in Alberta.

My government's goal is to ensure that Alberta remains a technological leader in the 21st Century.

Petrochemical Industry – A Major Achievement

My government remains strongly committed to the development of the petrochemical industry in Alberta. Over $6 billion has been invested in petrochemical and related facilities to date, with more than 6,000 Albertans employed in the industry. These plants have located in a number of communities throughout Alberta, contributing significantly to local business activity and enhancing employment opportunities. Major new investments are planned for Alberta totalling over $1.5 billion.

The growth of the petrochemical industry in Alberta represents a major success of my government's policy of diversifying and broadening the economic base of the Province.

New investment activity in the downstream plastics processing industry will see over 25 new projects or expansions planned for 1989.

Agriculture – Long-term Outlook Good

Agriculture remains the number one economic priority of my government and the foundation of our province.

Two new federal-provincial farm financial management programs have been announced. The Alberta government will contribute to the funding of a three-year Farm Financial Management Training Program and a Farm Financial Advisory Service.

We will protect our farmers from high interest rates through two different initiatives. Farm families will have access to a Small Business Interest Shielding Program for operating capital.

In addition, the government has extended the Alberta Farm Credit Stability Program for an additional two years, and revised the program to increase the maximum loan limit per family farm unit to $250,000. The interest rate on these loans stays at 9% over a 20-year period.

We continue our commitment to reduce farm input costs. Both the Farm Fertilizer Protection Plan and the Farm Fuel Distribution Allowance will be continued. A further reduction of five cents per litre in price of farm diesel fuel has been introduced under the Farm Fuel Distribution Allowance. As a result, farmers will now receive an allowance of 14 cents per litre on diesel fuel. Farmers will continue to receive a nine cents per litre allowance on gasoline under the program, and will in addition remain exempt from Alberta's fuel tax.

My government has created a Farm Employment Fund to help create hundreds of jobs on the farm, providing employment for workers and an extra hand for farmers during busy times.

My government remains deeply committed to maintaining the well-being of rural Alberta.

Energy — Gaining Strength

My government has been successful in maintaining an attractive climate for investment in the conventional oil and gas industry. After the price decline in 1986, my government assisted the industry to adjust to the new international price environment. In 1988, exploration and development activity was at the fourth-highest level in Alberta's history. However, in early 1989, high interest rates and uncertainty over oil prices have made it more difficult for the oil and gas industry to raise new equity to invest in conventional exploration and development. My government will continue to work with industry to ensure that the investment climate continues to remain attractive. It will assist the industry in promoting Alberta oil and gas prospects and raising new equity for investment in Alberta.

My government recognizes the importance of developing Alberta's energy resources in an environmentally responsible manner. The Alberta Energy Resources Conservation Board has a well-deserved reputation for its technical expertise and its careful consideration of the environmental and conservation impacts of resource development. Through the Energy Resources Conservation Board, my government is working to ensure that Albertans are aware of proposed developments at an early stage, and have the opportunity to participate in the planning, evaluation and authorization of energy development projects. My government also ensures that energy development is in the Alberta public interest, responsible to local concerns, and in compliance with strict environmental standards.

The Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority, supports a wide variety of research into new technologies to reduce even further the environmental impact of resource development. Through the Alberta Oil Sands Technology and Research Authority, my government has supported development of new technologies for treating water for re-cycling in steam generation and injection. Another initiative, the Underground Test Facility, offers the prospect of drilling wells from shafts and tunnels underneath the oil sands, minimizing suface disturbance. Research into new oil sands, extraction and upgrading, and other technologies, reflects my government's commitment to developing Alberta's resources in harmony with our environment.

My government continues to finance research into advanced coal technology to help ensure that coal remains an environmentally sound and economically competitive source of energy.

Business Outlook Remains Buoyant

During 1988 Alberta's economic base was strengthened, with manufacturing shipments and merchandise exports up more than 10 percent and over 14,000 new businesses incorporated. In the first three months of 1989 there were 3,618 new incorporations.

The Alberta government will continue to support small business investment in the province. My government has announced two new programs intended to provide a measure of relief to Alberta businesses which are being adversely affected by the high interest rate policy of the Bank of Canada.

The Small Business Interest Shielding Program will cover the interest rate difference between 14 percent and the rate charged by a financial institution, to a maximum of five percentage points on loans of $100,000 or less to eligible businesses or farms.

The Alberta Capital Loan Guarantee Program will enhance small business access to credit by providing partial guarantees to lenders who make loans to eligible businesses. These loans are to be used for new investment, not re-financing, and the guarantee can be for up to five years depending on the purpose of the loan and the security provided.

My government remains committed to fairness in the marketplace and will take further initiatives to ensure fair dealing in the financial markets in Alberta. Measures will be taken to increase investor protection with respect to illegal insider trading. Rules governing take-over bids will be simplified and made more uniform relative to the other provinces, while at the same time increasing protection to Alberta shareholders.

Legislation will be placed before this Assembly to improve the regulation of credit unions and trust and loan companies.

In March of this year, my government joined with the other Western provinces in signing an agreement to improve access by all businesses in the region to each government's tendering process for goods and services, and construction contracts. My government will continue to work towards achieving a national procurement agreement to reduce or remove barriers that inhibit interprovincial trade.

In January, the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement was finally implemented. Albertans are now well on their way to securing the benefits of free trade with our most important international trading partner. My government will work to ensure that the implementation of the agreement is in the best interests of Albertans, especially as it concerns the important negotiations on trade rules and discipline concerning the use of government subsidies. We will do so in a fashion that respects and preserves the constitutional responsibility of the Alberta Legislature.

My government will continue to work closely with the federal government to pursue Alberta's objective in the Uruguay Round of the GATT multilateral trade negotiations. In particular, the success of GATT's agricultural negotiations is of great importance to Alberta's farm families. For this reason, we will urge Canada to play a lead role in the move to liberalize world agricultural trade.

We will continue to pursue full provincial participation in trade negotiations, as agreed to by the First Ministers at their conference in Halifax in 1985, and as implemented for the free trade negotiations. This is vital if we wish to ensure Alberta's interests are addressed and its objectives achieved in both bilateral and multilateral negotiations.

Many smaller communities in Alberta have the desire to develop and implement strategies to build on and enhance local business growth. My government will provide financial assistance on a cost-shared basis to small communities through a new program to help them with their local development projects.

My government's labour market initiatives, along with the strong performance of Alberta's private sector, continue to make an impressive impact on employment growth. The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate fell from an average of 8.1% in the first quarter of 1988 to an average of 7.4% in the first quarter of 1989.

Significant investments in the forestry, oil and petrochemical sectors will continue to generate jobs and further reduce the unemployment rate, but will also pose new challenges for my government. It is anticipated that as a result of investments in these sectors, the province will experience a strong demand for workers in several skilled occupations, especially the trades. In order to help to meet the skill requirements of industry, my government has introduced the Apprenticeship Work Experience Program, which will train apprentices in trades where demand is expected to be high.

In addition, a campaign to heighten the public's awareness of the value and need for apprenticeship training will be launched. It is expected that this program will encourage many individuals to pursue the trades as a career, thus significantly increasing the supply of skilled labour.

Workers' Safety and Compensation

Expanded initiatives are planned for occupational health and safety this year. Establishment of Alberta Occupational Health and Safety as an independent ministry will raise the profile and priority of this crucial area. Fostering a safe and healthy workplace, and the prevention of work-related injuries and ill health, remain the primary objectives of Alberta Occupational Health and Safety. These objectives will be enhanced by two significant initiatives undertaken earlier this year, upon which the organization will build. The recently introduced Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System and the Banff Roundtable discussions with leaders from industry, labour and government will provide solid foundations upon which to build partnerships and promote occupational health and safety.

The Task Force on the Alberta Workers' Compensation Board submitted its report in November, 1988. It included a number of major recommendations designed to improve the service to injured workers, make operations more effective and, in co-operation with Occupational Health and Safety, reduce workplace injuries. In November, 1988, the Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 1988, was proclaimed. The Act provided for an Appeals Commission separate from the Workers' Compensation Board, a Board of Directors responsible for policy matters, and the management of the Workers' Compensation Board operations under the direction of a President and Chief Executive Officer. The Task Force recommendations received widespread support, and the Workers' Compensation Board is proceeding to implement them.

Strong Alberta Families — the Heart of Our Society

My government has no doubt that through the family, society renews itself — a renewal nurtured by the love, care and support of all family members, including children, adolescents, adults and seniors. My government is committed to assuring that families remain strong, and that those in crisis receive the support of a caring society.

Substance abuse is a continuing dreadful threat to family life and our young people. As outlined on February 17, 1989, my government will propose legislation to establish the Alberta Family Life and Drug Abuse Foundation, and will seek the views of Albertans in addressing the issues of prevention, research and treatment of drug and other addictions.

Other initiatives relating to families will see expanded in-home support services; new initiatives to combat the devastating effects of family violence and additional support to our network of family shelters; additional resources for the Maintenance Enforcement Program; increased levels of day care subsidies for lower income families, and improved training requirements for all staff employed in day care centres. Planning continues for the Lieutenant Governor's conference on Alberta families.

Education - A High Priority

Albertans are mindful of the strong foundation that a quality education creates for our children's future success. This is especially so as we consider that the children entering grade school this year will be the first high school graduates of the twenty-first century.

Exciting new educational initiatives are being developed: distance learning for 130 rural schools; enhanced equity funding for school boards; additional support for schools with inner special needs in Edmonton and Calgary; and increased funding for community schools.

In post-secondary education, opportunities will be expanded in several key areas. Business education will have more student spaces at the universities in Edmonton, Calgary and Lethbridge. Significant changes will occur in nursing education, university transfer programs will be expanded at our colleges; and more funding will be available for rural-based voluntary associations.

A substantial capital development program for our post-secondary system will be presented to this Assembly for approval.

Financial assistance to students across Alberta has always been a priority of my government. Student living allowances will be increased and an interest relief program will be implemented for students in need.

As we approach 1990, the Year of Literary, special events are being planned by Alberta Vocational Centres to take place throughout that year to create greater public awareness of this problem within our society.

Health Services For Prevention and Treatment

Access to high quality health services for Albertans is a continuing high priority of my government.

A new Department of Health Act will be presented to the Legislature, which will emphasize the effective delivery of services for both prevention and treatment in all health care facilities, both mental and physical.

My government is very concerned that breast cancer is the single largest cause of death in women aged 40 to 59 years. During this Session, plans will be unveiled to initiate a breast screening program for early detection of cancer.

A commitment to recognize the need for improved standards and increased access to emergency health services will be presented to the Assembly in an Ambulance Services Act.

Home care funding will see a significant increase to enable senior citizens to remain independent in their own homes. My government believes that families are strengthened when they can choose between services in their homes or in health care institutions.

Many patients require long-term care, and in a move to offer more effective choices to meet those needs, a capital expansion program will add 1,500 new long-term care beds throughout the province.

Significant new funding will provide added equipment and oxygen in nursing homes, as well as increased staff and upgraded programs.

Seniors – The Foundation of Our Heritage

A Seniors Medic Alert Program, recently announced, will allow seniors with lower incomes to obtain a grant of up to $700 to purchase approved medical alert systems. In addition, volunteer, non-profit groups will receive start-up funds of up to $20,000 to establish or expand medical alert networks.

An expanded Home Adaptation Program for seniors and the disabled, and a Seniors Independent Living Program, have also been announced.

These new initiatives emphasize the priority my government places on providing the best possible services to our seniors.

Alberta – Leading in Environmental Protection

Alberta will continue to exercise its jurisdiction over the environment and is resolutely committed to preserving the quality of Alberta's natural beauty for future generations.

Alberta's new pulp mill environment standards take into account the latest technology and are receiving international recognition. My government has sponsored a series of formal and informal meetings to allow individuals and groups to raise questions or concerns about the forestry projects. In addition, an expert Review Panel on Forestry Management has been established to review concerns that are raised at those meetings.

Alberta is a world leader in the field of hazardous waste disposal and my government will maintain this leadership position by helping to establish a Centre of Expertise in Special Waste Management, which will assist private entrepreneurs to export Alberta expertise and technology to the world.

Meeting Special Needs

The Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities is now fully operational and working with individuals, community agencies and government departments. This input will be the basis of an improved action plan that will enable the province to assure full and equal participation of disabled citizens in Alberta society.

The Committee to Review Services to the Mentally Handicapped has held forums across the Province and as a result of input received from interested citizens and groups, recommendations will be made to improve the range of services available.

Our history as a province reveals a strong tradition of support for individual rights and freedoms. In keeping with this tradition, my government will introduce amendments to the Individual's Rights Protection Act to prohibit discrimination based on mental disability and which will extend protection against sexual harasssment to all employees, including domestic employees and live-in farm workers.

In Partnership with Communities

New multi-year partnership programs with cities, towns, villages, summer villages and rural municipalities announced February 17, 1989 remain a high priority of my government.

The acceleration of the existing program for paving Alberta's nearly 15,000 kilometer secondary highway system was announced during the recent election, and will include the paving of the remaining 8,300 kilometers of highway by the year 2000. These secondary highways provide essential access for the families and businesses in many communities and are a critical link in our Province's transportation network. As a result of these highways being paved in a shorter period of time, there will be economic benefits such as enhanced tourism and employment opportunities, and reduced maintenance costs, as well as increased safety.

Response to Needs of Municipalities

In 1986 my government announced a comprehensive public review of the entire system of municipal government in Alberta that would lead to legislation appropriate to carry Alberta municipalities through the last decade of this century and into the 21st century. The Phase I report of the Municipal Statutes Review Committee has been received. My government will be responding in the near future, and the committee will be proceeding to prepare legislation in consultation with Albertans.

Historic legislation will be introduced to enable the incorporation of Alberta towns in national parks. This uniquely Albertan arrangement will bring local decision-making to the residents of Banff for local government matters and has been developed through the co-operation of the Government of Canada and the Banff School Board with my government.

The province recognizes the importance of the property tax as the mainstay of local government finance and the need to ensure that the incidence of the tax is fair and equitable for all taxpayers. Action will also be taken to encourage all municipalities to maintain their assessments on a current basis so that taxpayers can make more knowledgeable judgements as to the fairness of the assessments on their property.

Housing for Albertans

My government's commitment to assisting Albertans to obtain affordable housing is reflected in some of the lowest housing costs in Canada. The recent elimination of loan ceilings for the Mobile Home Loan Insurance Program has enabled many more families and individuals to purchase their own homes. Continued social housing initiatives will ensure that lower income families and individuals have access to subsidized rental accommodation. To respond to the housing needs of our aging population, four new senior citizens' lodges will be undertaken in 1989, in addition to 230 seniors' self-contained apartment units. These initiatives will complement a $5 million commitment to the regeneration of older lodges to ensure these facilities continue to fulfill the housing needs of our seniors.

New initiatives to demonstrate our government's continuing commitment to Alberta's families in the area of homeownership and to senior citizens housing include the:

Alberta Mortgage Interest Shielding Program, with over 250,000 homeowner expected to benefit from this two-year program. Homeowners who are obtaining a new mortgage for the purchase of a home, renewing their mortgage or have a current mortgage interest rate above 12 per cent will be assisted up to a ceiling of 17 percent;

The Alberta Family First-Home Program, with over 36,000 Albertans expected to benefit from this year program. The Alberta Family First-Home Program assists first-time home buyers;

and a

Garden Suite Project, which will see a total of six Garden Suite demonstration units being developed for senior citizens in Alberta.

Working With Native People

My government's commitment to Alberta's native people is illustrated by historic leadership shown in negotiations with various Indian Bands in an effort to settle outstanding treaty land entitlements.

As well, legislation will be introduced to accommodate the transfer and entrenchment in the Canadian Constitution of the ownership of land to our Metis settlements.

Senate Reform

A truly effective Senate requires the support and confidence of Canadians from all parts of the country. Alberta will continue to provide leadership in promoting the benefits of a "Triple E" Senate.

In keeping with its commitment to an elected Senate, my government intends to reintroduce the Senatorial Selection Act. When the Senatorial Selection Act was introduced in February it was widely acclaimed as an innovative and progressive step toward comprehensive reform of the Senate. Members of the Assembly will be asked to give their approval to this historic legislation which will, for the first time, enable Albertans to select nominees for the Senate through popular election.

Members of the Legislative Assembly:

In due course, you will be presented with the budget estimates. You will be asked to authorize the necessary funds for operating services and expenditures, and to endorse a program of capital financing for the Government of Alberta. You represent a beautiful Province of strength, hope and promise.

I leave you now to the business of the Session, with full confidence that, as elected representatives, your debates and your votes will reflect your responsibilities to all Albertans.

I pray for your wisdom and your strength.

God Bless Alberta.

God Save the Queen.